16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

133
361
311

Figure 4. Low Village and Inis Thiar from the castle

ing has obscured in most places the disconformities between strata. Four rift 133
valleys indent the terraces, and the eastern one runs the entire length of the island 311
to the ocean and holds a 90-feet-deep fresh water lake (see Fig. 7). This valley [361]
and two of the other three to the west of it running half the length of the island
form two promontories on the upper terraces of which the other villages are
situated. Indenting only the lower terraces, the fourth rift is a minor one; it forms [172]
the valley in which the axe heads were discovered. Wells are found in each of the
rift valleys where shale strata are bared. The four villages, from west to east, are
Low, High, Castle, and Terrace.

Located in Low Village (see Fig. 4) are two grocery stores, known as 361
"shops," and an old coast guard station, and in High Village are the post office 34
and church; other buildings of importance are the new school on the common
land and the lighthouse at the back of the island. I already have described the
monuments of historical significance so need not consider them further. The older 366
of the two shops in Inis Beag is situated at the southwest margin of the common
land, while the other stands close to the rocky shore at the north end of the com-
munity. Simply a large, narrow room on the ground floor of the two-story dwelling 366
of its owner, each shop also serves as a public house, or "pub," where wines, spirits, 276
beer, stout, soft drinks, and tobacco are sold. Benches along wall and counter serve
the customers who linger, and purchases are made across the counter or in a small
enclosed room near the door, called the "snug." The usual occupants of the shop
are men who come to drink, smoke, visit with their neighbors, and sometimes
purchase goods for their families. Women and children when buying provisions [443]
usually enter the snug for privacy and confer with the shopkeeper through an
aperture opening on the counter. At night, the snug allows small groups of men to [521]
discuss matters of a private nature over drinks.

Coast guard personnel first were assigned to Inis Beag shortly after the 000

17: Messenger E-4,5 (1958-1966)1971 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inis Beag

Celts. But local legend, historical evidence, and genealogical data collected by my wife and me indicate that the present population is descended from immigrants who came to the island from many parts of Ireland following the Cromwellian incursion of the seventeenth century. The islanders still express bitterness over conditions of poverty and servitude experienced by their ancestors during the 300 years that they lived under absentee Anglo-Irish landlords. All of the excesses of foreign domination suffered by mainland peasants were suffered by the inhabitants of Inis Beag, but were aggravated by the ordinary hardships of island living. Little was known about events in Inis Beag during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries until the island was visited by archeologists and publicized in their scientific writings. The surrounding area of the mainland was very much isolated and seldom visited at that time, although trading between Inis Beag and nearby communities was carried on, and passing ships sometimes called at the island.

Agricultural pursuits have always dominated the subsistence economy of Inis Beag. Most householders own land on which they grow potatoes and other vegetables, grass, and sometimes rye and sally rods and where they pasture cattle, sheep, goats, asses, and horses. The back of the island, behind the communities, is divided into four strips, and each landowner possesses numerous plots located along the "quarter" on which his village fronts. The average combined holding is sixteen acres, and almost 50 percent of the land is composed of arable indigenous and manufactured soils. Potatoes are the staple crop, and they are supplemented by various other vegetables, milk from cattle and goats, meat from island sheep, fish, eggs, and other foods, many of which are imported and sold in the shops. Rye is grown for thatching, and sally rods are used to weave several types of containers. Other subsistence activities (which also provide income for some folk) are knitting, weaving, crocheting, tailoring, and sandal making.

A slowly expanding cash economy features the export of cattle and sheep fattened on the island and of surplus potatoes and fish, the collection of seaweed for extraction of iodine at a mainland factory, the keeping of tourists in private homes, and the manufacturing of craft objects for sale to visitors and for export. At the turn of the century, fishing from canoes—with nets and lines often many miles out in the ocean—was an important subsistence and income activity. A few islanders who owned little or no land lived primarily by fishing and kelp-making. But over the past few decades, fish have become less plentiful and the weather more inclement, especially during winter